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Memorandum for: THE RECORD

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The following written brief was prepared
at the request of George Kolt NIO/EUROPE.
An information copy was passed to [redacted]

[redacted] at the Pentagon. She included it
in a briefing package on the air corridor
situation for BG Rowe, the Principal
Deputy to DAS Lauder.

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EUR/A/WE/GN
29 April 1985

The West Europeans and the Air Corridors

In responding to challenges to the status quo in Berlin, the need to develop coordinated positions with the British and French occasionally hampers the West. The time lost in this process frequently permits the Soviets and East Germans to establish new precedents and *faits accomplis*. Moreover, the expectation that the Allies may differ on an issue -- or that a fragile consensus may fall apart -- no doubt encourages the Soviets and East Germans to be less than responsive to Western demands and protests. The same may well be true in the case of the air corridors, where British and French reluctance to participate in demonstration flights may pose an obstacle to firm Allied actions.

Differing Perspectives

The British and French approach Berlin issues from different perspectives, and this sometimes hinders the development of coordinated positions. The British tend to view Berlin issues in terms of their impact on UK-West German ties. The French, on the other hand, view Berlin issues more in terms of their role as a victorious power in World War II. As a result, the British often are more cautious and flexible, while the French generally take a hard line against any perceived erosion of Western rights.

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British and French Positions on the Air Corridors

Until now, Allied coordination on the air corridor issue has been relatively good. The most serious substantive difference has been over the distance from the edge of the Berlin Control Zone (BCZ) that the West should propose to the Soviets as a reservation-free zone. The British appear willing to accept 15 miles, whereas the US Mission in West Berlin would prefer 20 miles.

Achieving Allied agreement in favor of stronger actions -- particularly demonstration flights -- will be difficult. The British believe that before taking more forceful actions, the Allies should make one last effort to resolve the issue in the Berlin Air Safety Center (BASC). The British have suggested that the Allies specify to the Soviets a reservation-free radius rather than wait to see what the Soviets might offer. The French, however, are in favor of taking stronger action now, apparently believing the Soviets already have given as much as they are going to in the BASC.

The French are opposed to further demarches unless they are backed up by a readiness to take even firmer actions.

Neither Ally -- at the moment at least -- appears ready to agree to demonstration flights running the full length of the corridors. We expect them to insist on so-called "shaving" flights through the disputed airspace at the end of the corridors. The British may even balk at this, suggesting that it could require direct interventions at the foreign minister or head of government levels to overcome lower-level resistance to demonstration flights. We believe that, under certain circumstances, pressure at this level might even achieve agreement to length-of-the-corridor flights.

Our ability to garner -- or maintain -- Allied support for demonstration flights will depend on two factors. If the United States and Soviet Union are still exchanging recriminations over the Nicholson shooting next month and overall US-Soviet relations appear at a standstill, we believe the Allies will be even more reluctant to approve demonstration flights. Such action could be viewed by West European public opinion as a provocation of the Soviets and -- in a more hostile climate -- would appear to invite a harsher Soviet response. Secondly, we would expect the Europeans to drag their feet if the Soviets give some indication of flexibility on the air corridor issue in response to planned high-level demarches.

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The West German Position

West German support for a tougher Allied posture is not a prerequisite, but Bonn has indicated that it wants to be kept informed. The West German position probably will be unhelpful and confusing in the decision period prior to demonstration flights. While they will expect the Allies to prevent a deterioration in Western access rights to Berlin, they also will be reluctant to support actions which could worsen the international climate. Nonetheless, provided they are convinced that the principle involved is a serious one, we believe the West Germans would be firm. At this stage in German history, preventing serious encroachments against the Western position in Berlin remains a more immediate objective than improved relations with the East.

Support for tougher action is more likely to be found in the Chancellery than the Foreign Ministry. Expertise on Berlin issues in the Chancellery is limited

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West Berlin Mayor Diepgen has indicated to US diplomats on several occasions that he supports firm action to maintain Western rights in

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Berlin. His support (public, if necessary) could be important in winning over West German public opinion. We believe his support is likely to be firmer if he is consulted -- or at least informed -- in advance about the operation.

The West Germans will want to avoid publicizing Allied problems with the Soviets in and around Berlin unless the Allies are prepared to act decisively. In that event, Bonn probably would advise publicity as beneficial in preparing public opinion for an adverse counteraction, for example, a Soviet shootdown or force down of an Allied demonstration flight. In the absence of these conditions, the West Germans fear publicity would suggest Allied impotence in dealing with the Soviets on Berlin matters, as well as undermine investor confidence in of West Berlin.

West European Public Opinion

Provided the British and French governments firmly agree to proceed with demonstration flights, the Allies should not encounter significant public opposition in Western Europe, even in the worst case scenario in which one or more planes are shot or forced down. Indeed, the Allies should be able to count on significant public support, if the dispute at hand is defined in general as opposed to technical terms. Public support also will be strengthened, we believe, if it is clear (possibly even in advance) that the Soviets have ignored Allied warnings about the need to rectify the situation.

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In West Germany, we believe it will be difficult for any politically responsible person to criticize joint Allied action. The other West European governments are likely to be upset privately that they were not informed in advance about actions with such potentially serious consequences, but, with the exception of the Greeks, they probably will support (or at least avoid criticism of) Allied actions.

If the Soviets were to interfere with joint Allied demonstration flights, we believe that West European public opinion would support Allied efforts to ensure that Western rights are protected. Although we doubt Western governments would agree to economic sanctions against the Soviets, they probably would accept some types of political sanctions.

Europe-wide support for Allied action would be more difficult to get if the Nicholson affair continues to escalate. The West European public would probably view stronger Allied actions as related to the Nicholson affair, and therefore as provocative. They would be seen as more US-initiated than in response to an actual problem in the Berlin air regime.

The United States would face significant public relations problems in Western Europe if it were forced to act unilaterally. Although there would be some support in conservative circles in West Germany -- and possibly belated and half-hearted support from London and Paris -- unilateral action would appear much more provocative than coordinated action. Opposition politicians in West Germany and elsewhere might argue that the United States was needlessly jeopardizing the peace. Embarrassing questions

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probably would be asked as to why Britain and France had opted against participation.



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